



A WELL-RESPECTED ARCHITECT
Stuart Silk founded his namesake firm in 1981, and has since earned recognition at local, regional, national, and international levels. He has served on the American Institute of Architects' design juries, has lectured at several universities, and continues his passion for the arts by serving on the boards of the Henry Art Gallery, Plesch Institute, CoCA, and Arcade.

GREEN VS. 生态友好

Award-winning Seattle architect Stuart Silk gets real about how the United States measures up to China in terms of green architecture

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► **SINCE HE OPENED HIS ARCHITECTURAL FIRM** three decades ago, Stuart Silk has been a design powerhouse racking up a host of accolades for stunning luxury residences around the world. Silk is a master of versatility who refuses to embrace any single architectural style. And now, with more than 24 green certified projects under his belt, he demonstrates that sustainable design is comfortable in any idiom or culture. *Green Building & Design* columnist Alan Oakes, on special assignment for *New American Luxury*, interviewed Silk about the green movement in the emerging luxury market of China, where he worked on the Zhongkai Sheshan Villas, and how it compares to what's going on in the United States. Here's what he had to say.

When I think of China, I think of supersized green—eco cities for a million people that seem to spring up with the snap of a finger. What does China face today when it comes going green?

The growth and movement of people from rural areas to city areas is phenomenal—it's the most incredible migration in the history of the world. What China has to build in order to keep up with the migration is incredible.

So the scale is completely different than what's going on in North America.

Every year, China erects more than 20 billion square feet of non-industrial floor area, about 60 percent of this is residential and the rest is commercial. This building boom covers almost 8,100 square kilometers with concrete and asphalt annually. In the United States we're only adding a few percent each year, so we're not increasing pollution any more than we were last year at that pace. The result is that on certain days in Shanghai and Beijing, because of the pollution generated by this incredible influx of people, it's very difficult to even breathe.

And the building standards—from a green standpoint, are the two countries comparable?

China has upgraded its standards so they're comparable to ours; they require double glazing, a certain quality of insulation, and that kind of thing. But it takes so much more to heat and cool buildings in China because there are so many more buildings being built each year; much of it is coal-powered energy, and all of those emissions are going into the atmosphere.

The Chinese are flooding the American market with inexpensive solar panels. Are they trying to use green energy at home?

They do have wind power, solar energy, etc. But like the United States, this accounts for just a small percentage that is being provided—so small, in fact, that it barely even comes up on a pie graph.

The old style of luxury is all about space, excess, and using more. I wonder what luxury means now, in a green society—whether that society is Chinese or American. You work in a high-end market. How has the green movement shaped your clients' thoughts about what's luxurious?

We're in a section of the market where most of our clients want what they want, and what they want is space. A person who wanted to build a 6,000-square-foot house five or ten years ago is still going to build a 6,000-square-foot house today. We have not seen a movement where people are suddenly saying, "We really want to pare down." That being said, we can now make a 6,000-square-foot house perform like a 2,000-square-foot house did 10 years ago.

What about just wanting to be more efficient?

We currently have more than 20 projects certified—or in the process of being certified—by LEED and Built Green. The reason we're doing so much sustainable design is because our clients are socially conscious and they are confident that we can help them without compromising aesthetics. They're willing to spend additional money for added performance in energy efficiency, cleaner air, as well as a host of other green features.

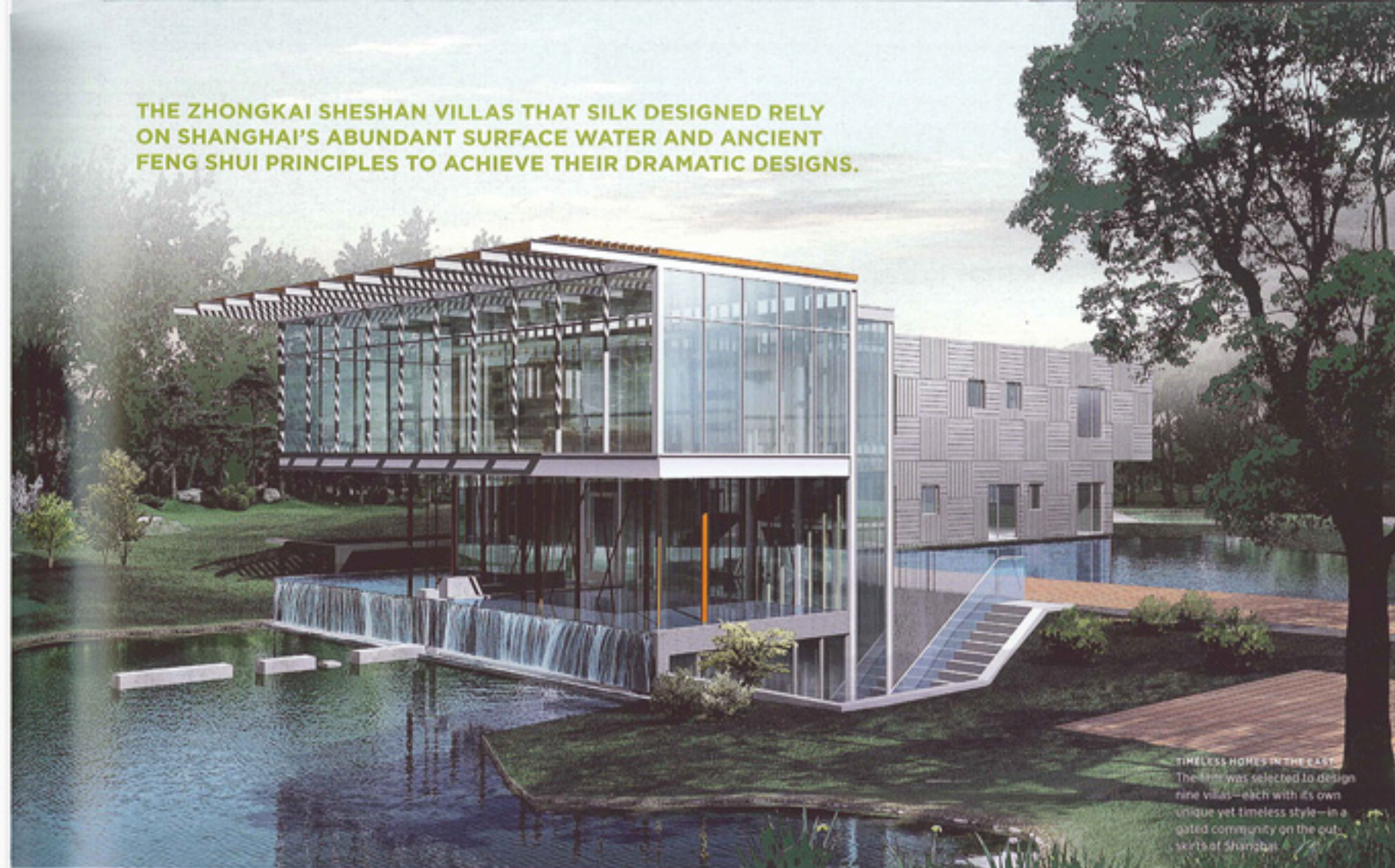
As an eco-conscious architect, are there green design choices you typically make regardless of the culture?

An interesting thing has happened: sustainable practices have gotten into our DNA. The things we do now, as a design standard, were things we thought were really far-out six or eight years ago. The whole bar is moving in the green direction. It is inherent in the work. We know the technology now so we can subtly push things. We don't mandate the house be green. We want clients to embrace it.

You did an elegant eco renovation of a Queen Anne residence in Seattle. If that house was in China, would it be possible to do the same things?

Yes, but China doesn't have an abundance of high quality craftspeople, so it is much more challenging. China's high-end residential industry is unlike the United States, where all of the trades are available. The Chinese laborers that work on houses are not particularly well skilled.

THE ZHONGKAI SHESHAN VILLAS THAT SILK DESIGNED RELY ON SHANGHAI'S ABUNDANT SURFACE WATER AND ANCIENT FENG SHUI PRINCIPLES TO ACHIEVE THEIR DRAMATIC DESIGNS.



TIMELESS HOMES IN THE EAST
The firm was selected to design nine villas—each with its own unique yet timeless style—in a gated community on the outskirts of Shanghai.

SILK'S SOPHISTICATED RENOVATION OF A HISTORIC QUEEN ANNE RESIDENCE, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BENDER CHAFFEY, IS A TESTAMENT THAT GREEN DESIGN CAN BE ACHIEVED IN ANY ARCHITECTURAL STYLE.



CONTEMPORARY INTERIOR
For this Seattle home, Silk was tasked with seamlessly integrating a contemporary aesthetic inside a stately 1910 Queen Anne residence.

Sounds difficult.

You have to build in a bulletproof factor. When we designed Zhongkai Sheshan Villas, our strategy was to select materials that were systems; those systems were essentially imported from the United States.

Do the Chinese still want contemporary architecture to adhere to what some call the most ancient system of ecological design, feng shui?

What we found out about feng shui is: its literature reads, "Thou shalt not do this, this, and this," but in reality, you couldn't design a house that way unless you were on 20 acres in Kansas and you can orient it exactly as needed. What the Chinese now say about feng shui that it's almost opportunistic in a sense—if you can do something that raises your feng shui "points," then you do it. But if you can't do it for functional reasons, then you dismiss it and go for something else.

Describe how you see the green movement worldwide today.

When you think about a building that was built 20 years ago, there is really no difference in that project than, say, a building that was built 100 years ago. ... That's no longer the case. Right now we are creating buildings that are highly sophisticated in both their systems approach and in their attention to energy, air quality and water intrusion—and I think that's part of the green movement. Part of that is driven by changing codes, and some is driven voluntarily because it makes sense. There's no such thing as a Model T anymore. ●

A MESSAGE FROM BENDER CUSTOM CONSTRUCTION

Bender Custom Construction is privileged to have worked together on many homes with Stuart Silk Architects, an elite firm leading the Northwest in custom residential architecture with both traditional and contemporary styles. We have truly enjoyed our relationship working with the talented staff that Stuart has put together. Their professionalism, passion, and endless energy is demonstrated in the care they take with their clients.